Managing student participation: Teacher strategies in a virtual EFL course

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This paper aims to explore teacher strategies for managing student participation in a complex Multi-user Virtual Environment. Data include transcribed recordings from a task-based EFL course in Second Life. Conversational Analysis is adopted to analyze the teacher's verbal language output in the transcript, and a student questionnaire is used to complement the findings from the transcript. The results suggest that teacher strategies are influenced by task phases and also by the specific nature of Second Life.

Keywords: teacher strategies, managing student participation, EFL, Second Life

1. Introduction

With the emergence of online teaching platforms, studying factors that affect online participation has become an essential for designing and facilitating online learning (Vonderwell & Zachariah, 2005). Recently, a number of researchers have started to explore factors affecting online participation in different learning contexts (e.g. Vonderwell & Zachariah, 2005; Hrastinski, 2007; Wang, Deutschmann, & Steinvall, 2013). Wang et al. (2013) have mapped a model of factors affecting participation in the most popular Multi-user Virtual Environment (MUVE), Second Life (SL), and emphasize that the teacher role is an overarching factor among all the factors in their model.

Previous research has discussed teacher strategies for managing student participation in online EFL learning contexts (e.g. Sotillo, 2000; Zou, 2013). However, there has been limited research into how teachers

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manage student participation in complex MUVEs. Accordingly, the present study aims to examine teacher strategies for managing student participation in an EFL course in SL. This is done by using Conversational Analysis (CA) to analyze the teacher talk in the course.

2. Previous research

2.1 Teacher strategies, teacher talk, and CA

Managing a classroom usually refers to teacher strategies used "to establish order, engage students, or elicit their cooperation" (Emmer & Stough, 2001, p. 103). In other words, teacher strategies are of particular importance for managing student participation in a classroom. As Emmer and Stough (2001) maintain, students should be engaged in learning tasks, regardless of the types of tasks, in order for the learning outcome to be achieved. Regarding collaborative learning, the context of the current study, Emmer and Stough (2001) suggest that teacher strategies be modified and complex: a teacher can use some traditional strategies such as "monitoring students in groups" (p. 109), but needs to develop new strategies such as "keeping students accountable for individual work in a group context" (p. 109).

There is an important relationship between teacher talk and student participation (Walsh, 2002). However, previous research has focused on criticizing excessive teacher talk time, instead of conducting a qualitative analysis of teacher talk (Walsh, 2002). As Walsh (2002) argues, in teacher-fronted tasks, explaining grammar for example, teachers may need to deliver "complex teacher talk" (p. 4), and student participation may not be desired much. In contrast, in tasks aiming at eliciting student responses, students are expected to participate actively (Walsh, 2002).

Given the dynamic and changing nature of EFL classroom discourse, CA has been applied to studying teacher talk and student participation in institutional settings (Walsh, 2002). CA refers to "the systematic analysis of the talk produced in everyday situations of human interaction: talk-in-interaction" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 11). Within CA, the overwhelming rule in the turn-taking system is that one speaker speaks at a time. Contrary to this rule, overlapping turns, that is two speakers speak simultaneously, are common in task-based synchronous online communication (Smith, 2003).

There are some new trends in recent studies of institutional conversations by using CA (Mori & Zuengler, 2008). For example, some studies use both talk-in-interaction and participants' background information to examine interaction. Some research has tried to "combine microanalyses of classroom talk aided by CA or CA-informed techniques and some theoretical perspectives accounting for the learning process" (p. 24) such as scaffolding (Mori & Zuengler, 2008). Scaffolding is a process of "giving information, prompts, reminders, and encouragement at the right time and in the right amounts, and gradually allowing students to do more and more on their own" (Woolfolk, 2004, p. 60). This study is also a microanalysis of teacher talk, which addresses scaffolding provided by the teacher.

2.2 Managing student participation

Using CA to study institutional conversations, researchers can investigate how participants organize their turns to complete course tasks, how institutional roles are realized in interaction, and how interactional power is negotiated between students and teachers (Mori &

Zuengler, 2008). These points are illustrated by presenting relevant teacher strategies for managing student participation.

One teacher strategy concerns latching turns. Latching between turns, which is often marked by "=" in transcripts, is defined as "no interval between the end of a prior and start of a next piece of talk" (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974, p. 731). With reference to the latching turns in the face-to-face EFL classroom, Walsh (2002) suggests that English teachers should provide a model of "the language needed at the end of a previous turn" (p. 13).

Turn initiation constitutes a teacher strategy. Using CA, researchers find that student turns are usually initiated by teachers in the face-to-face classroom (Mori & Zuengler, 2008). Similarly, Deutschmann and Panichi (2009) find that in their study almost all the student turns in the first session of an English course in SL were initiated by the teachers, but the students took more initiative in managing their own turns as the course progressed. Deutschmann and Panichi (2009) thus argue that the teacher actively coordinating student conversations and encouraging student participation are of particular importance at the beginning of an English course in SL.

Another teacher strategy involves how teachers control topics in institutional conversations, for example, initiating and changing topics (Chun, 1994). According to Zou (2013), within the online context, teacher initiating topics is important to keep students on task and to encourage student participation. However, student participation was hindered when teachers changed topics by raising new questions and did not check students' understanding of earlier interaction in Abdullah and Hosseini's (2012) study of a face-to-face EFL classroom.

The imperative mood is also a teacher strategy that can be interpreted as a way of using teacher power in conversations with students. The imperative mood can be used to start a new topic or expand a topic (Chun, 1994). Sotillo (2000) finds that teachers use the imperative mood more often than students in online English learning. Abdullah and Hosseini (2012) point out that the teachers' frequent use of the imperative mood in their study seemed to signify teacher power over students.

Using questions has traditionally been considered an important teacher strategy. As reported by Mori and Zuengler (2008), teachers use questions prominently to initiate student turns in the face-to-face classroom. Teacher questions usually consist of two types: display questions and referential questions. Display questions are questions "for which the teacher knows the answers beforehand and requires students to display knowledge" (p. 33), and referential questions are questions used by teachers to seek information that teachers do not know (Luu & Nguyen, 2010). Referential questions can be divided into two subtypes: open referential and closed referential questions (Luu & Nguyen, 2010). Teachers can use open referential questions to elicit complex and long student responses; otherwise, teachers can use closed referential questions such as yes/no questions when preferring short responses with small amounts of information (Luu & Nguyen, 2010). In the face-to-face classroom, Shomoossi (2004) indicates that teachers use display questions more frequently than referential questions. It is generally acknowledged that referential questions trigger more interaction as display questions require short answers and thus do not elicit long language output (e.g. Luu & Nguyen, 2010; Abdullah & Hosseini, 2012). Yet, Luu and Nguyen (2010) argue that display questions can enhance student participation in practicing the target language.

Taking a back seat has been considered an important teacher strategy. As an EFL course moves forward, it is suggested that a teacher should give students an important role in **107**

managing their own conversations (Walsh, 2002). When communication breakdown occurs, which can be caused by students' lack of proper words or communication strategies, a teacher needs to provide necessary scaffolding to move conversations forward (Walsh, 2002). However, Mori and Zuengler (2008) remind us that even occasional teacher intervention can transform conversational structure when students stop their group work to address the teacher interruption.

Creating a social communicative environment is conducive to EFL in MUVEs (Peterson, 2012). To my knowledge, there have been no specific studies of teachers' use of social formulas within MUVEs. However, two points are worth mentioning. First, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) maintain that efficiency is intensified at the sacrifice of politeness in online learning, compared with face-to-face communication, because online participants use short expressions and neglect mitigation when typing fast and sending quick messages. As a result, online messages seem more direct and impolite (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Second, Chun (1994) considers the use of greetings, leave takings, and farewells as online conversational strategies when examining English learners' online conversational characteristics, which have been adopted to study student-student interaction in SL (Peterson, 2012).

Providing brief feedback without obstructing student participation is also a teacher strategy. According to Mori and Zuengler (2008), teacher correcting student-produced turns are prominent in the face-to-face classroom. However, Walsh (2002) suggests that teachers use direct and minimal error corrections with brief language to reduce interruption and maintain the conversational flow.

2.3 Managing student participation in SL

SL offers various opportunities for a language course. Firstly, it provides users with multiple communication modes. Users of SL have access to both text chat and voice chat modes, and both of the modes can be used publicly and privately. Secondly, SL offers users avatars that can be modified according to users' personal preferences. Avatars in SL can animate human actions such as crying and laughing. Thirdly, objects in the 3D environment can be built according to teaching and learning needs. Finally, there are open communities in SL with native speakers which can be explored by language learners.

On the one hand, SL has the potential for encouraging participation, but on the other, the complexity of SL can affect participation negatively. Language learners can be encouraged as SL offers new possibilities for language learning (Wigham & Chanier, 2013). For example, language learners can practice the target language by building objects together in SL, during which they use the target language in an authentic communicative context (Wigham & Chanier, 2013). The use of avatars and the authentic communication in SL can thus enhance student participation (Peterson, 2012). However, student participation can be affected negatively in SL. As Inman, Wright, and Hartman (2010) maintain, students can consider SL as a gaming environment and do not take learning seriously, and the critical requirements of SL for computer capacities and bandwidth can also impact student participation negatively especially when technical problems occur.

In view of the above, it has been suggested that teachers may need to develop new strategies for managing student participation in SL (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009). For instance, teachers may need to "formulate procedures for managing group discussions in SL" (Baker et al., 2009, p. 62). Confusion occurs when overlapping turns happen due to the availability of the multiple communication modes in SL (Baker et al., 2009). It is also suggested

that teachers give students technical support or training as students may not have the necessary technical skills at participating in SL activities (Mayrath, Traphagan, Heikes, & Trivedi, 2009), and that teachers compensate for the lack of body language in SL by using back-channeling to signal interest in student conversations (Deutschmann & Panichi, 2009).

3. Material and method

3.1 The course

The course studied in this paper is a spoken business English course for undergraduate students in SL. The course aimed at giving students an opportunity to practice their spoken and communicative skills in various business contexts and to learn how to use an online environment. This course is a task-based language teaching (TBLT) course. In TBLT, tasks include activities in which the target language is used for communicative purposes by learners (Willis, 1996, p. 23). There are three chronological phases in a TBLT course, namely, pre-task phase, during-task phase, and post-task phase (Ellis, 2003). The pre-task phase entails task introduction and language preparation; the during-task phase focuses on student performing learning activities; and the post-task phase mainly involves the teacher feedback (Willis, 1996).

The course under study was held entirely in SL. During initial course activities, the teacher instructed the students to use the communication modes, especially the public voice chat, which was the preferred communication mode for students to practice their spoken skills. To show students how to orient their avatars, the teacher also used different locations for different activities within the SL environment that was used in the course. For example, the teacher used a virtual classroom for a language practice activity and a campfire location for a group discussion.

In the course, there were 17 students from different countries with an average age of 24. With the consent of the teacher and the students, this course was recorded using the screen-capture software ScreenFlow. The total length of the recordings was approximately 17 hours.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

As the public text chat was seldom used, the transcribed data include only the recorded public voice chat. Note that there was no access to the private communication modes. From the recorded sessions, 85 minutes and five seconds of the recordings were transcribed using transcription conventions developed in CA (see Appendix A). The latching and overlapping of turns, pauses between and within utterances, and wrongly pronounced syllables were noted. This data include the three phases of a TBLT course. Specifically, the pre-task phase activities included the teacher testing students' audio, exchanging nice things that had happened, a language practice for showing agreement, disagreement, and changing a subject for role-play. The during-task phase activities comprised a group discussion of picking up a lie from the stories told by the teacher, a role-play practice concerning how to deal with a large number of pigeons in town, and a role-play assessment of a board meeting. The post-task phase activities were confined to the teacher feedback on student performance and participation in the role-play practice and assessment. All the activities were conducted in small groups, with the number of students ranging from three to seven.

In order to protect the students' identities, students were given fake family names **109**

according to their nationalities. The number of the students represented in the transcript was 16: seven Swedes (Andersson, Eriksson, Gustafsson, Karlsson, Nilsson, Petersson, and Svensson), two Chinese (Zhao and Liu), one Ethiopian (Bikilla), one Finn (Virtanen), one German (Wulff), one Pole (Nowak), one Russian (Ivanova), one Slovak (Sklenár), and one student of unknown nationality (Unknown).

To investigate how the teacher managed student participation in the complex environment of SL, the data analyses focus on the teacher strategies introduced in 2.2. Teacher talk under study refers to the teacher's verbal language output in the course. Moreover, the students were asked to fill in an online questionnaire right after the course completed. The online questionnaire addressed the students' self-evaluation of their English proficiency and participation and also involved the students' reflection on the teacher and on SL, especially as regards participation. See the questionnaire in Appendix B.

4. Results

4.1 Latching turns

Latching turns occurred often when the teacher interacted with the students in the voice chat probably due to the lack of body language to signal the end of a turn. To deal with the latching turns, the teacher's responses were very brief in most cases, but the teacher used longer linguistic output in the pre-task phase while mainly using minimal responses in the during-task phase, as illustrated in examples (1) and (2), with the relevant linguistic output in bold type. Note that some lines were omitted from the examples for brevity.

(1) (from the pre-task phase)

Teacher: […] I'm gonna give you some really outrageous opinions no:w and what you have to do i:s do what it says against your number. and number 1 is always gonna be me, […] Skåne, that part of Sweden called Skåne i:s erm really the only thing you can do with it is give it back to Denmark […], a:nd then I hand over to Mr Karlsson who is number two. so what Mr Karlsson has to do is agree with what I said, and then add something. go on Mr Karlsson=

Karlsson: =oh I- I agr- agree completely […]

((six turns omitted))

Teacher: […] now we carry on to Ms Virtanen, and you're number 3, and this time you are gonna disagree, and add something.

Virtanen: we:ll I can't agree because […]

Teacher: […] and then erm number 4 […] Ms Zhao, (2.0) now- now you get to add something now, you can sa- you can agree you can disagree or you can say something completely different. go on Ms Zhao=

Zhao: = ( ) **I can't follow you. because I don't know what's you are talking about=**

Teacher: **=no, that's fine we're talking about a region of Sweden called Skåne.**

(3.0)

Zhao: Skåne?

Teacher: yes, it stan- it stands in the very south. yes. ((laughing))

Zhao: **I haven't heard that before=**

Teacher: **=right, that'll do fine.** […]

(2) (from the during-task phase)

Svensson: **=it sounds very expensive=**

Teacher: **=erm=**

Virtanen: **=yeah they're like stupid animals**

Teacher: [erm]

Peterson: **[it's] much cheaper to just kill them =**

Teacher: **=erm=**

In example (1), the students and the teacher were doing the language practice. Regarding the opinion giving the Swedish region Skåne back to Denmark, the teacher nominated Zhao to respond. Zhao reacted as she could not follow the topic at all, indicating that Zhao might have a lower oral proficiency than the other students. In the student questionnaire, Zhao rated 2 on how her oral proficiency affected her participation (1 = very negatively, 3 = made no difference, and 6 = very positively). Note that eight students answered the questionnaire. Moreover, being Chinese, Zhao did not know the Swedish region Skåne. In contrast, the Swedish student Karlsson and the Finnish student Virtanen smoothly finished their turns. Upon Zhao's question, the teacher provided longer linguistic output to assist Zhao in finishing her turns. This case, however, suggests that choosing a topic that can be understood by all students is of importance especially when students are from different cultures. In example (2), the students were interacting during the role-play practice activity concerning the fictitious pigeon problem. In contrast with the longer linguistic output in example (1), the teacher's use of minimal responses "erm" can be taken as an indication that the teacher was paying attention to the students' conversations while not obstructing their participation (cf. Deutschmann & Panichi, 2009).

4.2 Turn initiation

Regarding how the teacher managed student turns, there are two marked tendencies. Firstly, especially in the during-task phase, most of the students' turns were self-initiated. This indicates that the teacher gave the students opportunities to manage their activities. **111**

This could be confirmed by an average rate of 5.5 (1 = do not agree at all, 6 = I agree completely) regarding the statement, "[T]he teacher had an open mind and listened to all views presented", in the student questionnaire, and by that the students rated their participation at an average of 4.5 (1 = very inactive, 6 = very active). Secondly, during the language practice activity mentioned in example (1), the number of the teacher-initiated student turns accounts for about four fifths of all the student turns, which is the same in the post-task phase. As example (1) shows, the teacher nominated Karlsson, Virtanen, and Zhao respectively to take turns. In the post-task phase, the teacher provided students with detailed feedback on their individual performances one by one, and after each feedback turn the teacher asked if the student had any queries, which led to a high number of teacher-initiated student turns. In summary, the teacher used teacher power to allocate equal language practice opportunities and feedback to all the students.

4.3 Topic control and topic shift

Although the teacher gave students opportunities to manage their turns in most cases, all the topics were initiated and closed by the teacher throughout the course. See example (3) from the during-task phase.

(3) (from the during-task phase)

> Teacher: **<we:ll ladies? erm this is a meeting that's been called by Ms Bikilla as a council officer to:** <u>hear</u> **what local people have to say and to try work out umm what umm what the town is gonna do about the problem of pigeons.** <u>so</u> over to you, Ms Bikilla, you get to start you get to introduce the situation and <u>invite</u> people to speak.>

> […]

> Teacher: […], **right ladies, I tell you you can take your role-playing hats off now but stay where you are ok?**

The students followed the teacher-initiated topics, and there was no evidence that the students were off topic or changed the topics (cf. Zou, 2013).

It is also revealed that the teacher changed the topic under discussion when the students were doing the teacher-assigned task. As example (4) shows, the teacher subtly changed the topic by using two interrogative sentences: "hmm is money the only the only consideration in life? or should we also think things like humanity a:nd respect fo:r other living creatures?"

(4) (from the during-task phase)

> Teacher: excuse me I am from the local newspaper, and I have a question fo:r erm Ms Nilsson, the animal lover here. umm, I understand that you don't think it's a good idea to kill the pigeons at all. ha- have I understood you right?

> Nilsson: yes, it's too barbaric.

> Teacher: what would you do instead then […]

(4.0)

Nilsson: well I think it would be possible like to <u>train</u> them?

(3.0)

Teacher: <u>yes</u> ? (1.0) <u>really</u> ? (2.0) train them to do what?

Nilsson: I don't know [it's like]

 ((eight turns omitted))

T: =erm if I- [if I- erm]

Nilsson: [can't kill] everything you hate.

Teacher: **hmm if- if I can just ask the question I mean just ask this question. hmm is money the only the only consideration in life? or should we also think things like humanity a:nd respect fo:r other living creatures?**

(8.0)

Nilsson: ( )

((four turns omitted.))

Teacher: **erm, bu- bu- perhaps we should stop thinking in terms o:f erm: finan- financial rewards, perhaps we should think about the quality of life instead**.

Svensson: what do you mean by quality of life […]

Teacher: **well yes, I mean it's- it isn't nice to have birds around our town?**

(5.0)

Nilsson: can we just like move some of them somewhere else.

The reasons why the teacher changed the topic in this role-play are as follows. In this role-play practice, the animal lover Nilsson was very inactive, and had only two very short turns before the teacher intervened and declared that he had a question for the animal lover. However, Nilsson's responses were short and the turns were taken back by the active students. Also note the long pauses between the teacher's initiation and Nilsson's response: a four-second pause, an eight-second pause, and a five-second pause (in bold type). When the teacher noticed that Nilsson was responding, "[can't kill] everything you hate", the teacher stopped immediately at the overlap. Having realized that Nilsson's response was still short, the teacher continued to shift the topic towards humanity and respect for other creatures by using the two interrogative sentences mentioned above, which was subtly **113**

directed at the animal lover Nilsson. Again, Nilsson only acknowledged this by an unclear short response, and the turns went back to the active students again. Having noticed this, the teacher tried to shift the active students' focus on "financial rewards" to "quality of life" and indicated that it could be nice to have birds, which was responded to by a short question from Nilsson. As the example shows, the teacher tried three times to shift the topic after the initial intervention to encourage inactive Nilsson to participate. As a result, Nilsson produced six more turns even though Nilsson's language output was limited in length. This teacher strategy brought the inactive student more participation opportunities.

In example (4), there are overlapping turns marked by "[ ]". Note that overleaping turns were common in this virtual course (cf. Smith, 2003; Baker et al., 2009) because no sign of a new turn was available due to the lack of body language in SL. Overlapping turns were also reflected on by one student in the questionnaire: "It was hard to know if some [sic] else were [sic] going to talk, sometimes several persons talked at the same time and with the result you couldn't hear anything."

4.4 The imperative mood

The overall tendency with regard to imperatives is that the teacher used directed imperatives, pointing to a specific student more often than general imperatives, pointing to the whole student group. As regards the three task-phases, the teacher's use of directed and general imperatives differs. In the pre-task phase, directed imperatives were used about three times as often as general imperatives. Conversely, directed and general imperatives were used much less and almost equally often in both the during-task and post-task phases. This can be explained by the fact that during the language practice activity in the pre-task phase, the teacher nominated the students to take equal turns, using the directed imperatives, such as "go on Mr Karlsson=" in example (1).

Directed and general imperatives have different impacts on student participation. Apart from allocating equal participation opportunities to the students as illustrated by example (1), the directed imperative in example (3), "so over to you, Ms Bikilla, you get to start you get to introduce the situation and invite people to speak", also served as guidance to the students regarding how to start the activity. In addition, it was also used to provide technical scaffolding to the students.

(5) (from the pre-task phase)

Teacher: =I can hear a lot- a lot of sound coming from your background. I can hear everybody moving around at the background. **[do me] a favor.** no, no that- that's ok. **do me a favor and just switch off your erm: your microphone when you're not speaking=**

Liu: [ah:::::]

Liu: =I'm sorry=

Teacher: **=you see- you see you go to the speak button, just unplug it […] so that it won't disturb us right? ok=**

Liu: =ok

Six students mentioned that technical problems affected their participation negatively in the questionnaire. Arguably, the teacher's technical support such as in example (5) could reduce the technical disturbance and facilitate student participation. This speculation is confirmed by a high average of 5.5 (1 = do not agree at all, 6 = I agree completely) regarding the statement in the questionnaire: "[T]he teacher always provided useful support when I encountered technical problems."

Directed imperatives were also used to encourage some inactive students to participate.

(6) (from the pre-task phase)

Teacher: […] what about you M:s Ms Liu. (2.0) anything nice happened to you? (4.0) ok, Ms Liu is not with us either=

Liu: =yeah ((with noises and echoes))=

Teacher: =yeah yeah go on. (2.0) go on=

Liu: =I just forgot to open my microphone yeah erm

In this example, the teacher asked Liu, who remained silent, to share nice things that had happened to her. While waiting for four seconds without response, the teacher believed that Liu was unable to participate. However, after that a distorted "yeah" was heard from Liu, and immediately the teacher used the imperative "go on" to give the floor to Liu. This example indicates that the teacher carefully monitored what was going on in the SL virtual classroom, and that active listening is of importance for a teacher to manage student participation in SL. If the "yeah" had not been heard by the teacher, Liu would have lost the opportunity to participate.

The general imperatives have two functions, as illustrated by the examples below.

(7) (from the pre-task phase)

Teacher: […] **guys don't be shy**. has anything else nice happened

(8) (from the during-task phase)

Teacher: […] have you- have you come to a: decision yet? I mean I'm not I'm not rushing you […] **come up to Pigeon ((a virtual classroom in SL)) when you are ready, and you can tell me which one you think is is the lie.** […]

In example (7), the teacher used the general imperative to encourage all the students present to participate, and in example (8), in which the students' task was to detect a lie, the teacher used it to provide task guidance. In the questionnaire, the students also rated this technique highly with an average of 5.5 (1 = do not agree at all, 6 = I agree completely) concerning the statement: "[T]he teacher was good at getting us to speak without taking too much space himself."

The above analyses show that the teacher used the imperative mood in different situations, which had different impacts on managing student participation. The teacher did not signify teacher power over the students in this EFL course, contrasting with Abdullah and Hosseini (2012), as the teacher did not use the imperative mood excessively. Moreover, **115**

the use of address forms such as "Ms Bikilla" (in example (3)), small talk, "<u>do me a favor</u>" and the rising tone such as in "right?" (in example (5)), toned down the imperative mood.

4.5 Using questions

The teacher used referential questions, both open and closed referential questions more often than display questions to elicit student turns. This result contrasts with Shomoossi (2004) in that teachers use display questions more frequently than referential questions in the face-to-face classroom. Concerning the three task phases, both referential and display questions are used more often in the pre-task and during-task phases than in the post-task phase, the reasons for which are examined below.

The referential questions have different impacts on managing student participation. Firstly, the teacher used them to encourage inactive students to participate, such as the open referential question "<u>yes</u> ? (1.0) <u>really</u> ? (2.0) train them to do what?" in example (4), to encourage the inactive student Nilsson to take a turn. Secondly, closed referential questions were used by the teacher to check students' understanding of the task, as shown in example (9).

(9) (from the pre-task phase)

Teacher: <so then guys, here are my stories. […] you can discuss amongst yourselves which one of those stories you think is a lie. **all right? everything's clear? >**

Eriksson: **clear**

Sklenár: **[yeah]**

Gustafsson: **[yeah]**

Nowak: **[yeah] clear**

Ivanova: **[ok]**

The teacher's question, whether all the students had understood the task, was responded to by the students. This check of the students' understanding of the topic was necessary so that the students could finish this activity. Later, the teacher checked the students' progress in the group discussion by the use of another closed referential question "have you come to a: decision yet?", as shown in example (8).

The infrequent use of display questions also have different impacts on student participation. Display questions in this study were mainly used during the language practice activity (cf. Luu & Nguyen, 2010). As the students were practicing language of agreement, disagreement, and changing a topic in numerical order (see example (1)), the teacher knew how the students were going to respond, as shown in example (10).

(10) (from the pre-task phase)

Teacher: […] women you know they- they- they should be educated but we should stop educating them when they're about 16. **don't you agree Ms Zhao?**

Zhao: erm yeah I- I- agree with you […]

Example (10) indicates that the use of display questions functioned as a way of allocating equal participation opportunities. Display questions were also used by the teacher to provide technical assistance during the audio testing activity.

(11) (from the pre-task phase)

Teacher: […] Ms Ivanova <u>I'm getting a little bit of feedback of my own voice coming back from you. sounds like your headset isn't: isn't</u> properly connected up. **do you know what to do?** ((with echoes))

Ivanova: erm::::::, can you hear me now better?

Teacher: I can hear you ok, but the only problem is that I can hear my own voice a couple of seconds erm later ((with echoes))

Ivanova: o::k

Teacher: […] **what you have to do is just use erm::: your erm: microphone when you're talking and when you're not talking just switch it off ok?**

In example (11), the teacher, who was an experienced SL user, knew how to solve the headset problem. By using the display question with an emphasizing intonation the teacher initiated technical scaffolding to Ivanova. This case confirms that the teacher's technical support to facilitate student participation is important in SL.

The data also show that the teacher used directed questions, pointing to a specific student, more often than general questions, pointing to the whole class. For example, "<u>do you know what to do?</u>" in example (11) and "don't you agree Ms Zhao?" in example (10) are directed questions, while "all right? everything's clear?" in example (9) are general questions. This highlights the special requirements placed on the teacher in SL: the teacher had to make the recipients of questions explicit so that no misunderstanding occurred, as no body language, such as eye contact used in the face-to-face classroom to signal the recipients, could be used.

4.6 Taking a back seat and intervening

The data show that the teacher took a back seat in the during-task phase, intervening only when needed.

(12) (from the during-task phase)

Svensson: ok but but I would like to get some numbers here […]

((seven turns omitted))

Svensson: I'm just concerned about the costs […] what about the taxes will you raise the taxes for our residents? or, could you? I mean I need numbers.

117

(3.0)

Teacher: **that's probably a question for Ms Bikilla as the council [officer]**

Bikilla: **[erm] (3.0) yes erm (5.0) the amount of cost it will erm the amount of cost it will ( ) are we are trying to kill and (4.0) erm can can you come again please?**

Svensson: yeah erm I- I'm just- I'm just concerned about the costs for the town and if you have to raise the taxes? erm so I would like to have numbers of basically how many animals we're talking about and how many hours […]

Bikilla: **ok, well the budget it's no:t we are not in a large amount of budget to: erm: get rid of the pigeons erm the money which comes fr- to do so is from the people taxes** […]

During the role-play practice, the teacher did not interrupt at all until he detected that Bikilla's participation was minimal. When Svensson asked for the numbers for the second time, there was a silence of three seconds. Upon this, the teacher indicated that it was a question for Bikilla. As a result of the teacher interruption, this student got two long turns. Therefore, it seems that the teacher's intervention helped the inactive student to participate.

4.7 Social formulas

The teacher used social formulas, i.e. greetings, leave takings, farewells, and polite address forms, often in his conversations with students, contrasting with Benwell and Stokoe (2006) in that politeness was sacrificed in online learning.

It is worth mentioning that many of the greetings used by the teacher have an added purpose: to test student technology, as shown in example (13).

(13) (from the pre-task phase)

Teacher: **let's see how everyone's sound is. […] Ms Sklenár, how how are you today?**

After initiating the audio testing topic, the teacher used the greeting "Ms Sklenár, how how are you today?" instead of a direct way (e.g. "Ms Sklenár, does your sound work?"). The dual use of greetings could be conducive to establishing social cohesion with the students and getting students technically prepared for participation. Moreover, this study generates similar findings to Wigham and Chanier's (2013) study as regards how teachers address students. Wigham and Chanier (2013) find that due to the limited body language in SL, the teachers in their study had to use the student avatars' names systematically, which was unusual in the face-to-face classroom when the students were in front of the teachers. In this study, the teacher also frequently addressed the students by using the polite address forms of "Ms" or "Mr" plus the students' family names even though they were face-to-face in the virtual classroom.

4.8 Feedback

The teacher seldom corrected student language errors in the pre-task and during-task phases; instead, he focused on providing teacher feedback when the students had completed the activities. Example (14) demonstrates the type of feedback the teacher gave to one of the students.

(14) (from the post-task phase)

> Teacher: […] **there's two linguistic points you need to work on. one of them i:s there were hell of a lot of** <u>likes</u> **in what you said.** […] o:ne one way out of it is to- is to practice giving yourself perhaps one or two more ( ) similar phrases that do the job. […] **the other is is just one sound. erm you need to start saying /∫/ not /s/.** […] it's- it's clearly a Finish problem […]

The example shows that the teacher provided feedback on two problems in Virtanen's language output: excessive use of "like" and the mispronounced "/∫/" sound influenced by Virtanen's mother tongue, Finnish. The two problems are also detected in the transcript and the recordings. From examples (2) and (15) below, it is seen that Virtanen often used "like" when talking, such as "=yeah they're like stupid animals" in example (2). The recording also discloses that Virtanen pronounced the sound "/∫/" wrongly, as implied by the italicized syllable "*sɦ*" in the word "relation*sɦ*ip" in example (15).

(15) (from the during-task phase)

> Virtanen: […] I have **like** good erm **relation*ɦ*ip** with the manager of our company's bank […]

The examples above suggest that providing feedback at the end of the tasks might have a positive influence on student participation: the students' conversational flow was not hindered by lengthy teacher feedback, which facilitated smooth communication. Four students also pointed out in the questionnaire that the teacher was good at giving feedback.

5. Concluding discussion

The results above reveal the teacher strategies for managing student participation and the impacts of the strategies on student participation in SL. This section discusses what contributes to the teacher's use of these strategies.

Task phases influence teacher strategies. In the pre-task and the during-task phases, the teacher did not correct the students' language deficiencies, whereas the teacher provided long feedback in the post-task phase. In the during-task phase the teacher gave the students opportunities to manage their conversations and intervened when encouraging participation was needed. The teacher also used brief responses at latching turns more in the during-task phase compared with the pre-task phase. Furthermore, similarly to what teachers do in the face-to-face classroom, the teacher provided task guidance to the students by using directed imperatives and general imperatives. The teacher also checked the students' understanding of the tasks and their working process by using display questions. By using these strategies, the teacher elicited and facilitated student participation.

The specific nature of SL makes some teacher strategies important. Firstly, explicit **119**

address in the public voice chat is required. Due to the limited body language, the teacher used more directed imperatives and directed questions than general imperatives and general questions. The teacher also addressed the students by their names systematically. By using these strategies, ambiguity was eliminated and interaction went smoothly in this virtual English classroom. Secondly, establishing a social learning environment is necessary. To make a compromise between establishing social cohesion with the students and the limited body language in SL, the teacher used greetings, leave takings, farewells, and polite address forms. Thirdly, providing technical scaffolding is of importance. As reflected by the students in the questionnaire, technical problems affected their participation negatively. To cope with the technical requirements of SL, the teacher employed different strategies: the imperative mood, display questions, and greetings. Arguably, these strategies reduced technical obstacles, and the students also rated the teacher's technical support highly in the questionnaire. Fourthly, regarding the large number of overlapping turns in SL, the teacher handed over the floor to students immediately at overlaps.

Fifthly, as students can explore the 3D environment and have private conversations that may be irrelevant to a course task by using the private communication modes, encouraging students to participate also deserves special attention in SL. The teacher encouraged both the whole class and specific inactive students to contribute to the course activities. To achieve this, the teacher used topic shift, imperatives, and questions. The teacher also allocated equal participation opportunities to the students by initiating turns and using display questions. The teacher's efforts to encourage the students to speak were also highly evaluated by some students in the questionnaire. Therefore, the teacher managed both the individual student participation and the group work as a whole, and engaged students in language learning tasks (cf. Emmer & Stough, 2001). Finally, keeping students on task is a necessity to prevent students from exploring the private communication modes and the 3D environment in SL. To deal with this, the teacher used teacher power to keep the students on task by initiating and closing the topics. This corroborates the findings in Abdullah and Hosseini's (2012) study. However, there is a contrast between Abdullah and Hosseini's (2012) study and the current study in that the teacher in this study controlled the students' activities while at the same time giving them opportunities to self-select their own turns by taking a back seat in the during-task phase.

The analyses above show that the teacher adapted strategies for the task phases and the complex learning environment in this EFL course. There is no reason to infer that the strategies used by the teacher under study are preferable, but it is a first attempt to draw attention to studying the quality of teacher language output within complex MUVEs.

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Appendix A

Transcription glossary

(Adapted from Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. x–xii, based on transcription conventions developed by Gail Jefferson)

(1.0)	The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
(())	The double bracket indicates a non-verbal activity, or encloses the transcriber's comments.
a:::	The number of colons indicates the degree to which the prior syllable is prolonged.
=	The equal sign indicates latching between utterances.
[]	Square brackets indicate the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk.
()	Empty parenthesis indicates the presence of unclear fragment in the recording.
.	A full stop indicates a falling tone.
,	A comma indicates a continuous tone.
?	A question mark indicates a rising tone.
under	Underlining indicates the speaker's emphasis.
yeah-	The short dash indicates a 'cut off' of the prior word or sound.
< >	The utterance within is delivered slower than the surrounding talk.
relation*ship*	The syllable(s) in italics is (are) pronounced wrongly.

Appendix B

The student questionnaire

1. What was your avatar name during the course?
2. What kind of avatar did you animate yourself during the course?
   - Animal avatar
   - Human avatar
3. What is your real life gender?
   - Male
   - Female
4. What was the gender of your avatar in Second Life?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Another
5. How old are you?

- 18–25
- 26–35
- 36–45
- 46–55
- 56–65

6. What is your native language?
7. What is your national/cultural identity (does not have to match your formal nationality)?
8. What is your overall evaluation of the course activities on a 1–6 scale where 1 is very negative and 6 is very positive?
9. Is there anything that you think worked particularly well during the course?
10. Is there anything that you felt worked less well during the course? Please feel free to leave suggestions here.
11. How would you rate your own engagement in the course activities on a scale of 1–6 where 1 = not interested at all, and 6 = very engaged? Please feel free to add any other comments on the topic of engagement.
12. How would you rate your own participation on a scale of 1–6 where 1 = very inactive and 6 = very active? Please feel free to add any other comment on the topic of participation.
13. How engaging on a scale from 1–6 did you find the role-play? 1 = uninteresting, 6 = very interesting. Please feel free to add any other comment on the role-play.
14. How engaging on a scale from 1–6 did you find the presentations? 1 = uninteresting, 6 = very interesting. Please feel free to add any other comment on the presentations.
15. How engaging on a scale from 1–6 did you find the teacher's lectures? 1 = uninteresting, 6 = very interesting. Please feel free to add any other comment on the topic of lectures.
16. How engaging on a scale from 1–6 did you find the group discussion? 1 = uninteresting, 6 = very interesting. Please feel free to add any other comment on the topic of group discussion.
17. How did the presence of the teacher affect your participation during your group discussion? Rate from 1–6, where 1 means very negatively, 3 means no difference, 6 means very positively. Feel free to add any comment.
18. How did the absence of the teacher affect your participation during your group discussion? Rate from 1–6, where 1 means very negatively, 3 means no difference, 6 means very positively. Feel free to add any comment.
19. Why did you join the course?
20. How would you rate your spoken English proficiency on a scale of 1–6 where 1 = not very proficient at all and 6 = native speaker?
21. How do you think your spoken proficiency affected your participation on a scale of 1–6, where 1 = very negatively (made me shy and I spoke less); 3 = made no difference, I spoke anyway; 6 = very positively (made me confident to speak more than others)? Please feel free to add any other comment related to spoken proficiency (the proficiency of others, for example).
22. How would you rate your written English proficiency on a scale of 1–6 where 1 = not very proficient at all and 6 = native speaker?
23. How do you think your written proficiency affected your participation on a scale of 1–6, where 1 = very negatively (made me avoid written communication); 3 = made no difference, I wrote anyway; 6 = very positively (made me confident to write more than others)? Please feel free to add any other comment related to written proficiency (did you prefer to text chat rather than speak, for example).

24. How well could you operate the software of Second Life on a scale of 1–6 where 1 = not at all, it was really confusing, and 6 = I could operate all the functions I needed well?

25. Rate to what extent you think that the software of Second Life affected your participation on a scale of 1–6 where 1 = very negatively (prevented me from saying what I wanted to), 3 = it did not make any difference, and 6 = very positively (made it easier to participate)? Please feel free to add any other comment related to the software Second Life.

26. Were there any other hardware issues that affected your participation (bandwidth, computer graphics, firewalls, headsets, etc)? Please specify.

27. How would you define your relation to others participating in the course in real life? You can choose more than one answer: student, colleague, friend, peer, independent, familiar. Please feel free to add a comment.

28. How would you define your relation to others participating in the course in Second Life? You can choose more than one answer: student, colleague, friend, peer, independent, familiar. Please feel free to add a comment.

29. How would you define yourself in relation to the teacher in real life? You can choose more than one answer: expert, friend, peer, dependent, familiar. Please feel free to add a comment.

30. How would you define yourself in the context of the course activities in relation to the teacher in Second Life? You can choose more than one answer: expert, friend, peer, dependent, familiar. Please feel free to add a comment.

31. How well do you agree with the following statements to the teacher. 1 = do not agree at all; 6 = I agree completely. Please feel free to add any comment.
- Overall, the teacher was skillful at his job of conducting this type of cross-cultural virtual course.
- The teacher spent more time teaching things rather than getting us involved in talking.
- The teacher took over the conversations rather than helping us to engage in speaking.
- The teacher was good at getting us to speak without taking too much space himself.
- The teacher was interested in what I had to say.
- The teacher had set opinions that he tried to impose on us.
- The teacher had an open mind and listened to all views presented.
- The teacher always provided useful support when I encountered technical problems.

32. Below you will find a number of different personality traits. Try to describe your personality in real-life communicative events by ranking yourself on a scale of 1–6 according to the given traits.
- Quiet (1) – talkative (6)
- Inactive (1) – active (6)
- Inflexible (1) – flexible (6)
- Nervous (1) – confident (6)
- Controlled (1) – spontaneous (6)
- I avoid conflicts (1) – I enjoy a good argument (6)
- Serious (1) – humorous/funny (6)
- Find it difficult to find clever findings to say (1) –intelligent (6)

33. Below you will find the same personality traits. Try to describe your personality in Second Life communicative events by ranking yourself on a scale of 1–6 according to the given traits.
- Quiet (1) – talkative (6)
- Inactive (1) – active (6)

- Inflexible (1) – flexible (6)
- Nervous (1) – confident (6)
- Controlled (1) – spontaneous (6)
- I avoid conflicts (1) – I enjoy a good argument (6)
- Serious (1) – humorous/funny (6)
- Find it difficult to find clever findings to say (1) –intelligent (6)

34. How experienced would you rate yourself on a scale of 1–6 when it comes to communicating with people from other cultures? 1 = no experience at all, and 6 = very experienced. Please feel free to add any comment related to cross-cultural experience and if/how this may have affected your participation.
35. How well do you agree with the following statement, where 1 = I do not agree at all, and 6 = I agree completely. The teacher introduced a lot of cross-cultural communicative knowledge that was useful for my future cross-cultural communication.
36. Do you think that SL and/or this type of cross-cultural learning situation add value to the learning experience? If so, how?
37. Please feel free to leave any comments here about the course, your participation, cross-cultural communication, technology, etc.